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BATTLE

BY

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

AUTHOR OF "DAILY BREAD," "FIRES," "BORDERLANDS
AND THOROUGHFARES," ETC.

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1915

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BEFORE ACTION

I sit beside the brazier's glow,
And, drowsing in the heat,
I dream of daffodils that blow
And lambs that frisk and bleat—

Black lambs that frolic in the snow
Among the daffodils,
In a far orchard that I know
Beneath the Malvern hills.

Next year the daffodils will blow,
And lambs will frisk and bleat;
But I'll not feel the brazier's glow,
Nor any cold or heat.

BATTLE

THE BAYONET

This bloody steel
Has killed a man.
I heard him squeal
As on I ran.

He watched me come
With wagging head.
I pressed it home,
And he was dead.

Though clean and clear
I've wiped the steel,
I still can hear
That dying squeal.

THE QUESTION

THE QUESTION

I wonder if the old cow died or not.

Gey bad she was the night I left, and sick.

Dick reckoned she would mend. He knows a
lot—

At least he fancies so himself, does Dick.

Dick knows a lot. But maybe I did wrong

To leave the cow to him, and come away.

Over and over like a silly song

These words keep bumming in my head all
day.

And all I think of, as I face the foe

And take my lucky chance of being shot,

Is this—that if I'm hit, I'll never know

Till Doomsday if the old cow died or not.

BATTLE

DEAF

This day last year I heard the curlew calling
By Hallypike
And the clear tinkle of hill-waters falling
Down slack and syke.

But now I cannot hear the shrapnel's scream-
ing,
The screech of shells:
And if again I see the blue lough gleaming
Among the fells

Unheard of me will be the curlew's calling
By Hallypike
And the clear tinkle of hill-waters falling
Down slack and syke.

MAD

MAD

Neck-deep in mud,
He mowed and raved—
He who had braved
The field of blood—

And as a lad
Just out of school
Yelled: “April fool!”
And laughed like mad.

BATTLE

RAINING

The night I left my father said:
“You’ll go and do some stupid thing.
You’ve no more sense in that fat head
Than Silly Billy Witterling.

“Not sense to come in when it rains—
Not sense enough for that, you’ve got.
You’ll get a bullet through your brains,
Before you know, as like as not.”

And now I’m lying in the trench
And shells and bullets through the night
Are raining in a steady drench,
I’m thinking the old man was right.

SPORT

SPORT

And such a morning for cubbing—
The dew so thick on the grass!
Two hares are lolloping just out of range
Scattering the dew as they pass.

A covey of partridge whirrs overhead
Scatheless, and gets clean away;
For it's other and crueller, crafter game
We're out for and after to-day!

BATTLE

HIS FATHER

I quite forgot to put the spigot in.
It's just come over me. . . . And it is queer
To think he'll not care if we lose or win
And yet be jumping-mad about that beer.

I left it running full. He must have said
A thing or two. I'd give my stripes to hear
What he will say if I'm reported dead
Before he gets me told about that beer!

THE DANCERS

THE DANCERS

All day beneath the hurtling shells
Before my burning eyes
Hover the dainty demoiselles—
The peacock dragon-flies.

Unceasingly they dart and glance
Above the stagnant stream—
And I am fighting here in France
As in a senseless dream—

A dream of shattering black shells
That hurtle overhead,
And dainty dancing demoiselles
Above the dreamless dead.

BATTLE

VICTORY

I watched it oozing quietly
Out of the gaping gash.
The lads thrust on to victory
With lunge and curse and crash.

Half-dazed, that uproar seemed to me
Like some old battle-sound
Heard long ago, as quietly
His blood soaked in the ground.

The lads thrust on to victory
With lunge and crash and shout.
I lay and watched, as quietly
His life was running out.

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